

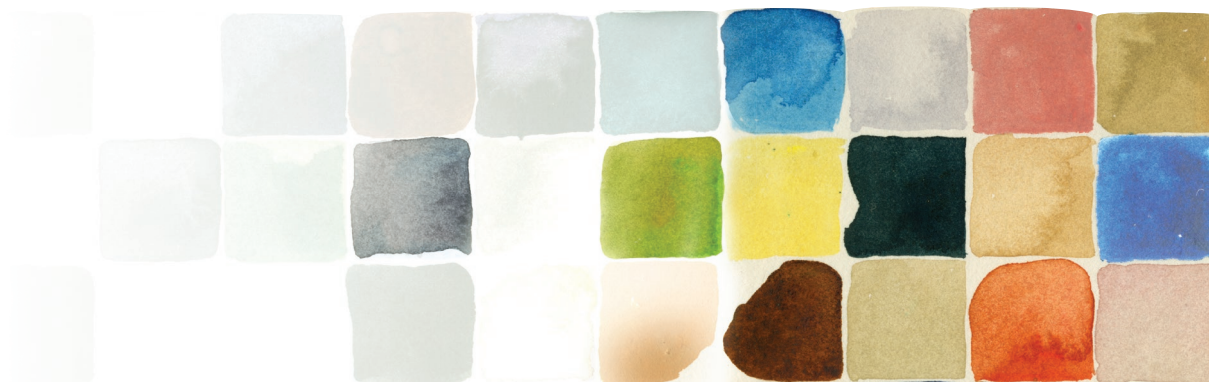
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ANNUAL
SIR JOHN
GRAHAM
LECTURE

2013

The Illusion of Neutrality

Why maintaining diversity in our public
discourse enriches democracy

DR JONATHAN CHAPLIN



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About the Sir John Graham Lecture

The Sir John Graham Lecture was established in 2005 by Maxim Institute to provide an opportunity for international experts to contribute to the policy debate in our country.

Maxim Institute is an independent research and public policy think tank, committed to the people, land, history and culture of New Zealand.

Our mission is to foster ideas and leadership that enable freedom, justice and compassion to flourish in New Zealand.

As a think tank, Maxim Institute engages in the following core activities:

- Producing research and informed analysis of contemporary issues;
- Developing and promoting sound public policy;
- Communicating our research findings and policy initiatives to the decision-makers and leaders of today;
- Training and mentoring tomorrow's leaders for all areas of community, political and business life; and
- Equipping New Zealanders to become better informed and more effective agents of change in their community.

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Sir John Graham



Sir John Graham is a New Zealand hero. He has spent his life training, inspiring and mentoring young New Zealanders in education and sport, having had a celebrated and distinguished career in both fields. He has been Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School, Chancellor of The University of Auckland, Captain of the All Blacks and President of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union.

John is a dedicated leader in our nation and his passion for New Zealand has endowed this country with a brilliant legacy. Appropriately, he was recognised for his services to education and the community, with a CBE in 1994, and was further honoured when he was knighted in the 2011 Queen's birthday honours list. John Graham's commitment to service and to this country has enriched all New Zealanders.

The Sir John Graham Lecture holds up John Graham's life as an example to tomorrow's leaders, encouraging them to serve our country well. It provides an opportunity to invite leading international experts to contribute to the policy debate in New Zealand. Public debate and discussion stimulate creative thinking and this event offers a forum for new ideas to be articulated, tested and refined.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin



Dr Jonathan Chaplin is Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Cambridge, UK (www.klice.co.uk) and a member of the Cambridge Divinity Faculty. He has taught political theory at institutions in the UK, the Netherlands and Canada and from 2004-2006 he held the Dooyeweerd Chair in Social and Political Philosophy at the ICS, Toronto. He is Senior Fellow of the Canadian think tank Cardus, for which he writes regularly, and has written and co-edited numerous publications. Dr Chaplin writes on religion and secularism for *Guardian* CiF Belief, and is currently working on a book entitled *Faith in Democracy? Towards a Post-secularist Settlement*.

The Illusion of Neutrality

Why maintaining diversity in our public discourse enriches democracy

Dr Jonathan Chaplin delivered the Sir John Graham Lecture 2013 on Tuesday, 6 August, at The Wintergarden in The Northern Club, Auckland.

Thank you for your very kind introduction, and sincere thanks to Maxim for honouring me with an invitation to deliver this prestigious lecture, and for their wonderful hospitality to me and my wife Adrienne during our time in New Zealand, our first visit. Let me also say what a tremendous privilege and delight it is to give this lecture in the presence of the distinguished public servant, educator and giant of national sport whose name and legacy it honours, Sir John Graham, and Lady Graham.

As I wondered how a largely unknown Brit might establish an instant rapport with an unfamiliar NZ audience, naturally I opted to go for the highest common denominator between our two nations – which is of course our longstanding joint campaign to defeat Australia at sport – no illusions of neutrality there. I know I'm in the presence of brothers and sisters in arms – or, in my case, armchairs. So let's just savour for a brief moment, shall we, our shared excitement at England's outstanding performance in retaining the Ashes – I say "retain," but of course, what's ours is yours. And why not savour all over again the British & Irish Lions' recent historic rugby victory over Australia, and our hugely successful joint campaign to beat Australia into tenth place at the London Olympics – we did it together. There's more – I come fresh from a social club in Coromandel where my Auckland host Glyn Carpenter took me to watch the Chiefs tell the Brumbies who's boss on Saturday. I got so excited I practically applied for New Zealand citizenship on the spot. And in such a spirit of solidarity, it's of course barely worth mentioning England's defeat of the All Blacks last December. Actually I note that the All Blacks website reports that quite distastefully as "emphatic England thrashes All Blacks." But there's surely no need for that kind of self-flagellation among friends – every game between us is a friendly.

So, now we've well and truly bonded, let's get to work.

Introduction

If you've read the blurb advertising this lecture you'll have seen this damning judgement on the state of New Zealand's politics: "New Zealand's current climate of pragmatic politics is suffocating our national debate"—a line, I must add, written by Maxim staff not by me. It would be presumptuous of me to address my remarks primarily to the NZ context which I know too little about. But a similar charge of pragmatism could equally be made against most western liberal democracies, including the UK, where the health of democratic deliberation is not in the rudest condition, to say the least. No doubt all of us here tonight would like to see our public discourse become more morally serious. I want to explore with you tonight just some of the factors that are hampering that moral seriousness, producing a tone and level of debate that so often leaves us uninspired, fails to get to the heart of public issues, seems oriented to short-term partisan advantage, and alienates many of its citizens – especially, and most worryingly, its younger ones, whose aspirations for a more just, free and compassionate future – to cite Maxim's strapline – are so often sapped just by the repugnant, or just bland, language of politics. And having explored those obstacles, I then want to gesture to a different model of democratic discourse that might make public debate more inspiring, even if it also makes it more demanding.

During a debate in 2008 in the UK over a controversial bill that would liberalise research into embryonic stem cells, a leading commentator noted: "Every day in parliament, fundamentally different world views do battle. Politics is all about the clash of moral universes."¹ This was not a Roman Catholic cardinal, though they certainly had their say in what was a noisy debate. It was one of Britain's leading secular humanists, Polly Toynbee of the *Guardian*. She well understood that embryology research isn't just a question of the marginal extension of a scientific technique. It throws up deep and difficult questions regarding the ethical responsibility of the scientist, when human life begins, what indeed counts as a human being anyway, and how the rights of the embryo (if it has any) are to be reconciled with the hope of better medical therapies. On those profound questions our societies are deeply divided.

I want to argue that, while politics isn't only about a clash of moral universes, it is at least about such a clash, and that we suppress the clash at our peril. And not only on issues like bio-ethics, where the differences are pretty clear, but on many public issues. Consider environmental policy – on which New Zealand is an acknowledged world leader. Currently the UK is starting a debate – if it rises to the level of a "debate" – about the use of the technique of "fracking" to exploit our underground natural gas reserves. What's at stake here isn't just the technical question of the cost-effectiveness or safety of fracking, but what it is that is driving our seemingly unstoppable need for ever greater supplies of energy, what this reveals about our hunger for ever-increasing material prosperity, and, deeper still, what our answers to those questions reveal about our fundamental view of the relationship between humanity and nature. Is nature merely a huge terrain of stuff for humans to master and exploit as long as they want, or is it a precious gift of which we are the trustees - an extraordinary labyrinth of delicate eco-systems on which human beings are radically dependent and which should be treated with suitable respect, even if we can't measure their economic value precisely? Whatever our stances on those two contested public policy questions, we can't address them adequately by suppressing the clash of moral universes underlying them.

I'm going to make three claims about what makes for a vibrant, healthy, democracy. The first is that a suffocating pragmatism is the outcome of the illusion of a neutral public square. The second is that we need to leave that illusion behind, to move beyond neutrality to diversity. The third is that a truly diverse public square – one which actively facilitates the expression of deep and contending convictions in public debate – might actually be better for democracy than a supposedly neutral public square.

1. Pragmatism and Neutrality

My first claim, then, is that a suffocating pragmatism is the outcome of the illusion of a neutral public square. Now, by “pragmatism,” I am not speaking of what is “practical,” the gritty realities of ordinary politics: the need to get business through, to build democratic coalitions, to strike workable compromises, to keep public finances under control, to maintain effective administrative machinery, and so forth. The great German social thinker Max Weber famously said that politics is like the “boring of hard boards” – it’s slow, onerous, grinding work in which achievements never meet aspirations, campaigns are lost more often than they are won, and nothing is ever finished. Politics operates under the limitations of human nature, the constraints of circumstances, and the law of unintended consequences. In politics you only get anything done if you are “practical” in this sense.

The kind of “pragmatism” I am criticising is something different. It is the denial of depth: the belief that you can do all those necessary kinds of practical things without paying any attention to the underlying moral, cultural or religious motivations that are always at work below the surface of things. These motivations are like the deeper currents and tides beneath the surface of the waves: if we simply try to negotiate our way around the waves, as a good surfer does, we may find ourselves in a very different place from what we expected - staying upright, perhaps still smiling, maybe even greeted by a cheering crowd, but not where we thought we’d be.

So pragmatism is the politics of surfing. It is deafness to deep convictions. But like currents and tides, these convictions do their work whether we are aware of them or not. They can’t be confined to our private behaviour or the inner recesses of our minds, making no difference to the public world. The public world is impacted by them all the time, even when – indeed especially when – we don’t recognise them.

And, in societies like ours which are increasingly marked by a plurality of underlying motivations and convictions, pragmatism inevitably leads to deafness to what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls “deep diversity.” For, when seen through the eyes of pragmatism, society looks flat and homogeneous, composed of basically similar individuals who seek more or less the same things - just more of them if possible. To shift metaphors: pragmatism operates like a pair of distorting spectacles, flattening our vision so that we can no longer see the variety, elevation and undulation of the social landscape. Society becomes a featureless open plain.

Two things accompany this kind of pragmatism. One is a preoccupation with technical solutions. A homogeneous society is predictable, manageable, its problems fixable by technical means – a tax break here, the pulling of an administrative lever there, a stimulus there. The other is a narrow focus on individual rights. This is because, on this view, the one thing homogeneous individuals share in common is the capacity to choose; everyone wants autonomy. And politics delivers autonomy through a regime of individual rights: rights supply the conditions for choice. The role of government then is to set up neutral procedures by which individual rights can be protected and balanced. Hence this version of liberalism is called “neutralist liberalism” or “procedural liberalism.” On such a view government must not promote a substantive moral vision of what makes for a good society but simply create neutral space for individuals to pursue their individually chosen visions of the good, if they have them. Neutralist liberalism isn’t so much the attempt to deny moral depth as the attempt to cordon it off from the city centre of democratic debate – the message is, “leave your deepest convictions at the ‘Park and Ride’ and take public transit into the centre.” Neutralist liberalism wants to keep our deepest moral visions off the agenda of public debate for fear of introducing insoluble divisions into public life, and to do that is to insist that we keep them safely confined to the private sphere. For we can all agree, can’t we, on what rights we should have? And we can agree, can’t we, on the techniques that will help us realise the choices those rights secure? So let’s keep public debate carefully focussed on these things, governed by shared canons of rationality, available to all. That way we’ll avoid needless distraction and destabilisation. That way we’ll be one nation, in public, even if we remain privately divided.

Now admittedly this is a simplified account of pragmatism and neutralist liberalism, but I don't think it's a caricature. It's the conception of politics that has been intellectually dominant in many western liberal democracies for perhaps a century. It is frequently the default mode when we think about and talk about politics. And the way we think and talk about what we do shapes what we do; indeed, because politics is so much about talking, it actually constitutes what we do.

2. Beyond Neutrality, to Diversity

So that's my first claim: that our contemporary pragmatism – our denial of depth – is the outcome of the illusion of neutrality, an illusion championed by the dominant form of contemporary liberalism. My second claim is that we must leave that illusion behind – we must move beyond a neutralist politics and embrace a pluralist one, one that actively embraces convictional diversity. It doesn't necessarily “celebrate” diversity for its own sake (not all manifestations of “diversity” are to be welcomed), but it harnesses its energy for democratic purposes. But before I develop that claim, I want to take a brief step back. For if we are to go *beyond* neutralist liberalism we must first look *behind* it: to see where it came from and, indeed, to honour its single great achievement. And to do that I want to draw on an analysis by the distinguished American political thinker William Galston, a liberal who is very attentive to diversity, who has a sharp eye for the variety of the social landscape. Galston points out that contemporary liberalism has been fed by two very different sources that are actually in tension with each other. One is the “Reformation Project,” the other the “Enlightenment Project.”² The Reformation Project wasn't what most of the Protestant Reformers actually had in mind when they set about reforming the church in the 16th century, but it was the actual outcome of what they did. By breaking up the unity of Christendom, and championing the radical notion that faith was a free choice, the Reformers and their followers prepared the way for an eventual rolling back of the state's jurisdiction over the churches – and vice versa. In time this made it possible to imagine that more than one church, indeed more than one faith, could peacefully co-exist within the same territory, and that political stability was not jeopardised by a varied social landscape of religious plurality.

The eventual outcomes were the doctrine of religious toleration and the separation of church and state – key foundations for what we today enjoy as civil liberty and constitutional democracy. This is the greatest achievement of the liberal tradition, and Galston argues that it derives from the Reformation Project.³ It lies behind our modern commitment to the religious impartiality of the state – the crucial goal of confining the state to statecraft and keeping it away from soulcraft. It is summed up in a judgement of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2003 in a highly important case on religion and the state: “the State's duty of neutrality and impartiality [among beliefs] is incompatible with any power on the State's part to assess the legitimacy of religious beliefs (...) and...requires the State to ensure mutual tolerance between opposing groups...”⁴ The outcome is a preference for what Galston calls the “diversity state” – a state intentionally carving out free public space for the expression of very diverse moral and religious commitments.⁵

But, Galston says, there's another line in the liberal tradition, which he calls the “Enlightenment Project.” This was the ambition not simply of separating the jurisdictions of church and state, but of freeing the state from all influence of religious conviction. Religion and tradition were oppressive, reason and science liberative. So religion must be contained and marginalised – it's just too jagged, too uneven for the flat open spaces of the new enlightened age. To be sure, the Enlightenment Project also contributed enormously to our modern civil freedoms. Yet Galston suggests it contained within it the seeds of a surprisingly illiberal outcome. This was the supreme priority it came to attach to promoting the moral autonomy of the individual through state action – hence the stress in modern liberalism on the regime of individual rights I alluded to earlier. Enlightenment liberalism assumed that if autonomy was promoted, diversity would necessarily follow. Free individuals would create their own landscapes – would pursue whatever beliefs they chose; the state would be neutral among them and a thousand flowers would bloom. But in fact, the active promotion of autonomy through the state actually obstructs true diversity because it privileges lifestyles and practices that put autonomy above other equally if not more important human values such as community, solidarity,

place, tradition or religion. It flattens the social landscape by treating all human communities as if they were formed by self-interested contracts – thereby failing to honour the denser, more demanding norms of groups like trades unions, ethnic communities or religious organisations. By imposing a regime intended to promoting autonomy-favouring ways of life, this form of liberalism squeezes out ways of life which place the priority elsewhere. Here's how Galston puts it:

[T]he decision to throw state power behind the promotion of individual autonomy can weaken or undermine individuals and groups that do not and cannot organize their affairs in accordance with that principle without undermining the deepest sources of their identity. . . . [S]tate-supported commitment to autonomy tugs against specific kinds of lives that differ fundamentally, not just superficially, from many others whose disappearance would reduce social diversity.⁶

He goes on:

To place an ideal of autonomous choice... at the core of liberalism is in fact to narrow the range of possibilities available within liberal societies. In the guise of protecting the capacity for diversity, the autonomy principle in fact represents a kind of uniformity that exerts pressure on ways of life that do not embrace autonomy.⁷

Galston offers the example of education. Autonomy liberals often suppose that state schools should positively encourage children to take distance from their inherited family traditions. But, Galston argues, true respect for children's religious freedom does not require that parents entrust their children to those who would be neutral towards their own beliefs. They are not obliged to send their children to a school which "[takes] the child on a tour of different faiths and secular philosophical outlooks and then saying, in effect, you choose." On the contrary, he says: "[P]arents are entitled to introduce their children to what they regard as vital sources of meaning and value, and to hope that their children will come to share this orientation...."

But, such liberals might retort: "won't this just provide cover for the perpetuation of dogmatic prejudice? Your romanticised social landscape actually conceals remote villages or hidden caves where nasty things happen out of sight." Now that is indeed always a possibility in a diversity state; each model of the state carries its own risks. But Galston asks us to consider what might be lost if we reject a diversity state:

Children immersed in a culture defined by advertising, entertainment media, and peer pressure are often dominated by influences that they neither understand nor resist. In the face of such challenges, to have any realistic prospect of exerting countervailing formative power, parents may be compelled to take a strong countercultural stance that involves substantial measures of family or communal separation from external influences.⁸

That, surely, is one powerful argument in favour of what in New Zealand are called "charter schools" and in the UK, "academies" and 'free schools.'

But now let me introduce you to an even more troubling implication of what Galston calls "autonomy liberalism." This emerges in the work of another American liberal, Stephen Macedo, who is much less favourable to diversity – he's a serious flatlander. Macedo has in his sights especially religious believers and religious communities, but in fact his point applies generally to any belief or group that dissents from what happens to be the majority position in a liberal democracy – feminism, socialism, radical ecologism, indigenous worldviews, and more.

To his credit, Macedo abandons the pretence that liberalism should protect a neutral public square. He argues for a "transformative" liberalism – a campaigning creed aimed at creating "liberal citizens," by which he means citizens who value autonomy above everything else.⁹ A liberal state should not merely protect individual freedom but should "shape the way that people use their freedom and shape *people* to help ensure that freedom is what they want. . . . it must constitute the private realm in its image and it must form citizens willing to observe its limits and able to pursue its aspirations."¹⁰ A liberal state "needs the right sort of civic culture," and that means generating religious communities "*of the right sort.*"¹¹

Macedo recognizes that this might appear to require the silencing of religious voices. Here's how he tries to reassure the religious. You won't be directly coerced, he says, but you'll face "a wide array of sometimes subtle expectations about appropriate forms of speech and reasoning which amount to a system of unequal psychological taxation sufficient to drive out certain patterns of deeply held belief and practice, not all at once but over the course of generations." He states the logic of his position frankly: "We should . . . preserve liberal institutions, practices, rituals and norms that psychologically tax people unequally, for if that has the effect of turning people's lives – including their most private beliefs – in directions that are congruent with and supportive of liberalism, thank goodness it does."¹² His conclusion is this: "[t]he extinction of many, if not all, of the communities that pose truly radical alternatives to liberal democratic political principles is to be welcomed."¹³

Macedo's militant vision of Enlightenment liberalism implies a system in which, as Galston puts it, "constitutional uniformity crushes social pluralism."¹⁴ In such a system, individuals or communities which dissent from the dominant version of liberalism won't be physically silenced but will face multiple obstacles to getting their voice heard. Their insights won't make any impact on public debate, and even if they are heard, they'll be at best patronised or sidelined, at worst dismissed as irrelevant or harassed as dangerous. In such a situation, public discourse would, I submit, become tediously monochrome. Here's how radical political thinker Shedon Wolin provocatively describes this version of neutralist liberalism. Its goal is to "[convert] differences from a threat to an accomplice of stability, co-opting them so that in the end they are eviscerated, absorbed into a consensus that requires smoothing off the rough, possibly irrational edges of differences"¹⁵ – the social equivalent, we might say, of mountain-top removal by mining companies in the Appalatian mountains.

3. Towards a Truly Pluralist Democracy

So I've argued, first, that a suffocating pragmatism is the outcome of the illusion of a neutral public square. And I've argued that if we want a genuinely free public square, we need to leave that illusion behind, to move beyond neutrality to diversity, from a flattened social landscape to one attentive to variety and undulation, one alert for the surprising vista around the corner. We need to move towards something like what Galston calls a "diversity state." In my final section I want to entertain the possibility that a truly diverse public square – one which actively facilitates the expression of deep and contending convictions in public debate – may be better for democracy than a neutral public square.

Let me first note that a more plural public square is already emerging in some liberal democracies, its advocates jostling uneasily for attention alongside defenders of a neutral one. For many years now, minority or dissenting groups within our societies – ethnic and cultural minorities like the Maori peoples in New Zealand but many others too, feminists, radical ecologists, orthodox Christians, Muslims and more – have been resisting pragmatism and neutralist liberalism, projecting their alternative visions into public debate and expecting them to be taken seriously. Some have done so constructively, others disruptively; some effectively, others cack-handedly. I gather that the record of Christian parties in New Zealand over the last 30 years has not been one of untrammelled success. But certainly the result is that public discourse is becoming less predictable, less manageable, at times profoundly unsettling for defenders of the current pragmatist establishment. The British journalist Paul Vallely underlines the challenge we now face, with a focus on religious voices:

The key question is can we now find a way of creating something positive and healthy from this crucible, or are we sleepwalking into an age of confrontation and blind defensiveness... We need to do something more than contain or translate that which we fear and do not understand. We need to find a balance which maintains the secularist separation of church and state but which allows the thinking and acting of religions to play their part in shaping the post-atheist culture which is forming all round us. It is the search for a new political language, and it is a massive and vital task.¹⁶

His point applies generally: not only to religious voices but many other minority voices. So it's not just a post-atheist culture we should seek, but also a post-liberal one, a post-colonial one, and a post-patriarchal one, and indeed a post-Christendom one. But not a neutral one, rather a plural one.

Well, what might a plural public square actually mean in practice? That's a huge question which needs to be answered differently in different contexts. But let me offer four broad suggestions to stimulate your own thinking: we need to *widen access* to democratic debate; we need to *slow down the pace* of democratic decision; we need to *clarify the parameters* of legitimate democratic speech; and we need to *nurture the conditions* for democratic virtue.

First, we need to commit ourselves to ensuring that the widest possible range of authentic voices on any public issue are given effective opportunities to express themselves: in media studios, in civic forums, in local councils, in national parliaments and elsewhere. This may make debate noisier and more turbulent. But that, I suggest, is a price worth paying because public discourse may well be enriched and challenged by the expression of dissenting insights and critiques that might otherwise be ignored. For example, these might concern the reform of health care, where the Hospice Movement or Alternative Medicine might have valuable critiques of the dominant technical model of medicine. Or they might concern criminal justice, where indigenous peoples like First Nations in Canada or the Maori here might instruct us in the possibilities of a restorative, relational model of justice and take us away from a solely state-centric one. Or they might concern the rate of immigration, on which immigrant minorities themselves, as well as indigenous peoples, might challenge so-called “progressive” assumptions. Or they might concern the regulation of abortion, where the voices of disabled people might challenge an entrenched pro-choice orthodoxy.

At the formal electoral level, systems of proportional representation, such as your own system of MMP, generally allow for a wider range of voices than first-past-the post systems like those in the UK or USA. I know a review of MMP is currently underway and that Maxim Institute has contributed to it. There may well be ways to improve this or any other proportional system, but such a system at least allows the prospect of a national voice to credible minorities who may have crucial insights to contribute to public policy. The proposal to create a new second chamber offering a platform for just such minority voices seems to me an appealing one. That is how I would like to see the British House of Lords reformed, and not transformed into a mirror image of the House of Commons and thereby consolidating the domination of parliament by the executive – a problem which I gather is very much in debate in New Zealand.

But an open-access democracy will not be created simply through these high-level formal arrangements. It will not be enough simply to remove barriers to entry, for, as in economic markets, everything depends on having the actual capacity and resources to make use of that access. We need, so to speak, demand-side political empowerment to parallel the removal of rigidities on the supply-side. So those who give leadership in various settings in civil society and politics should not just sit back and wait for new voices to come knocking on the door but also go looking for them, sending positive signals of encouragement for them to speak up – in their own dialects and not simply that of the majority secular liberal culture, but, equally important, encouraging these new voices to address themselves to matters of the common good and not simply safeguard their own specific interests

Second, we need to slow down the *process* of democratic decision – to move from a fast-food policy process towards a slow-food one, where more ingredients are considered for the recipe and slow-cooked to bring out a richer, more enduring taste. Critics often complain at the slow pace of political decision-making. But mostly that is not the problem: the problem is that parliaments and governments rush into decisions without reflecting deeply enough on the reasons for them or the consequences that may follow. In my view the recent debate on same-sex marriage in the UK was the perfect example of that rush to judgement; the debate on fracking might turn out to be another.

To commend what I'm calling “slow democracy” is to challenge the prevailing understanding of the very purpose of democratic deliberation. Under pragmatism and neutralist liberalism, its purpose is to reach a bare majority consensus as quickly as possible. In a truly pluralist democracy, however, the purpose of

democratic deliberation is first of all to allow all voices to be heard, even those Sheldon Wolin provocatively calls the “irrational edges of difference.” In doing so, a democracy thereby demonstrates that it ranks a commitment to the equal dignity of all citizens above a commitment to deliver so-called “results.” If reaching policy agreement is thereby made more difficult, that will often be a price worth paying, for in the longer-term whatever comes to be agreed on is likely to be owned by more citizens and therefore to be more, not less, stable.

So we need to widen *access* to democratic debate and slow down the *pace* of democratic decision. The **third** thing we need to do is to clarify the *parameters* of legitimate democratic speech. A pluralist democracy cannot be a complete free-for-all. Or, as William Galston puts it more graphically, “liberal democracy is not a suicide pact.” Democratic discourse needs to abide by firm and clear constraints of legality. Former Archbishop Rowan Williams is an eloquent advocate of the kind of democratic pluralism I’m commending. He sums it up as “a crowded and argumentative public square which acknowledges the authority of a legal mediator or broker whose job it is to balance and manage real difference.”¹⁷ That mediator is the state, and it must take the lead in working for a wide consensus on what should be legally permitted or proscribed in public debate, and then enforcing those limits firmly and consistently. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to what the relevant legal limits should be. Let me simply illustrate what is at stake here by referring back to that 2003 ECtHR judgement which earlier I praised for its affirmation of the religious impartiality of the state. The judgement turned on whether an Islamist-inspired political party in Turkey should be permitted to remain in government after it had been legitimately elected. The court’s concern was that the party had officially campaigned for the introduction of Islamic personal law (i.e. limited aspects of sharia law) to be applied to Muslim citizens. It judged that this campaigning activity was incompatible with the “secular” foundations of liberal democracy. But here it was using the word “secular” in a quite different, narrower sense: not the legitimate separation of church and state but the illegitimate separation of religion from politics – it was in effect rejecting the possibility of appealing to religious belief to justify a change in the law. In my view this amounts to a serious infringement of the right to free speech of Turkish Muslims, even though such campaigning would be experienced by many as a challenge to a key assumption of liberal democracy. Drawing the boundaries of even a diversity state isn’t easy, and is likely to need continual clarification and negotiation. But under democratic pluralism the default stance should always be a presumption on the side of free expression in the absence of very compelling arguments for confining it, such as imminent threats to social peace, security or constitutional order. The general rule should be: protect wide democratic territory, and then set and enforce clear boundaries to it.

The **final** suggestion as to how to move closer to a truly pluralistic democracy is to nurture the *conditions* for democratic virtue. But while the state can play a leading role in my first three suggestions, here, I think, it has to step back. The nurturing of the virtues of democratic civility is everyone’s responsibility: families, schools, the media, universities, civil society groups, NGOs, religious organisations, inter-faith networks, political parties, and many more. The state only has at its disposal the blunt instruments of law, policy and money, and these are not well-suited to the educative task of inculcating the virtues of democratic civility. What are these virtues? I’ve got no surprises here: reasoned argument, attentive listening, respectful tone, tolerance of opposition, readiness to compromise, and acceptance of democratic procedures. Now if all that sounds just too polite, too genteel, let me underline that these virtues all presuppose that *other* virtue which I already said we need more of: *courage* – the courage to allow ones deepest moral and political convictions to guide and inform our interventions in the public square, and to make them explicit where the occasion calls for it. To pick up secular humanist Polly Toynbee’s phrase again, we need to equip ourselves for the “clash of moral universes” that will often be at the heart of politics, if we have eyes to see it. Throwing ourselves into that clash will have its costs and it will often not be pretty but it is, I suggest, the necessary condition for any democracy worth the name.

Let me end with the words of Yale University law professor Stephen Carter who, again with religion in mind, puts his finger on the central challenge:

What is needed is not a requirement that the religiously devout choose a form of dialogue that liberalism accepts, but that liberalism develops a politics that accepts whatever form of dialogue a member of the public offers.... What is needed...is a willingness to *listen*, not because the speaker has *the right voice* but because the speaker has *the right to speak*.¹⁸

If we extend Carter's claim about religious citizens to all citizens, whether members of minority or majority communities, then we have a pretty good summary of the kind of open, democratic pluralism I'm proposing – one whose citizens are at ease with diversity, protective of its limits, open to its surprises.

Thank you.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Polly Toynbee, "Religion doesn't rule in this clash of moral universes," *The Guardian*, March 25 2008. She went on to say that religion should not actually be allowed to influence policy on the question.
- 2 William Galston, 'Two Concepts of Liberalism', *Ethics* 105 (1995), 525-6.
- 3 In the seventeenth century, John Locke in his famous *Letter on Toleration* stated the far-reaching conclusion thus: 'Neither the right nor the art of ruling does necessarily carry along with it the certain knowledge of other things; and least of all the true religion'. John Locke, *A Letter on Toleration* (1689), ed. James H. Tully (Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 36.
- 4 The case of *Refah Partisi (The Welfare Party) and Others v. Turkey*, §91. Other aspects of the judgement were seriously problematic, however, as I'll point out.
- 5 Galston, 'Two Concepts', 524.
- 6 Galston, 'Two Concepts', 521.
- 7 Galston, 'Two Concepts', 523.
- 8 William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104-6.
- 9 Stephen Macedo, 'Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion: Defending the Moderate Hegemony of Liberalism', *Political Theory* 26.1 (1998), 56-80.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 14 Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, 20.
- 15 Shedon Wolin, 'The Liberal/Democratic Divide: On Rawls' Political Liberalism', *Political Theory* 24.1 (1996), 103.
- 16 Paul Vallely, 'Private spheres, public squares', *Third Way*, 31.5 (June 2008), 17.
- 17 Rowan Williams, 'Secularism, Faith and Freedom', in Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (Bloomsbury, 2012).
- 18 Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (Basic Books, 1993), 230.